

Theresa Kittridge: I just hope that you think systemically, we really need to think about how do they keep people out? We need to think about how we can bring people in and with the women, what we're hearing is they need flexibility. That's not just in public office, but that's in corporate life, that's working in a variety of ways. How can you be more flexible?

Christy Kallevig: Welcome to Vital Connections On Air, a podcast brought to you by the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality, where we explore the topics and issues important to leaders across Minnesota. Today, I am excited to be joined by Teresa Kittridge, the founder and executive director of 100 Rural Women. Thank you so much for joining me today, Teresa.

Theresa Kittridge: Happy to be here. Thank you.

Christy Kallevig: I had the great pleasure of getting to know Teresa in an airport, and was it South Carolina? Right after we attended the Summit for Rural Women, and it was just such a lovely time. I think three years ago, almost already, that we got to connect, and at that point in time, you told me about this dream that you had of starting an organization called 100 Rural Women and congratulations. In the height of the pandemic, you launched your program and got started.

Theresa Kittridge: Yes, it's been quite a ride, but an interesting way to navigate, so ...

Christy Kallevig: Yes, absolutely. So why don't you tell all of our listeners exactly what 100 Rural Women is and what motivated you to start this great organization?

Theresa Kittridge: Yeah, so thanks, Christy, so happy to be here and be able to share about our work and in 100 Rural Women our main goal in life is to figure out how we can better connect rural women and inspire leadership. The way we really came together, it was since I've been ...since I was a kid, I was born in Worthington and grew up in up in Southwestern Minnesota. It always, just always bothered me and it always was just front and center for me that women were doing the work, putting everything together, but they were never in decision-making roles, there weren't enough of them in decision-making roles.

I spent 20 years working in the legislature, same thing, work nationally, same thing. It always was an interest of mine and a nagging issue of how do we get more women, how do we have more representation, more gender equity, having more women in leadership. So really, the way 100 Rural Women came together was during the 2016 election. I was sort of taken back and really thinking about the way women were being discussed and dismissed in the way rural America was being painted with this broad brush, and I kept thinking, that is not the real America I know, and it was really a point in time where I thought, you know, we need women, we need a rural women, to better support each other, we need to figure out how we can have more women leading more women getting engaged, more women in decision-making leadership roles across all sectors. So that's when 100 Rural Women came together.

I picked up the name, I left it at the Secretary of State's office, and I thought, I'm either going to build this with the national organization I was working with, or I'm going to come home and build it in Minnesota, and ... long story short, that's what I did. I ended up in 2019, I pulled the group of women together and talked about my idea, my business concept, it was not a brainchild idea, nothing brand new, earth-shattering, and it was like, "How can we get real women to better support each other and better encourage each other and learn how to ... what are those pathways to leadership? So that's how we all came together.

And as Christy shared, I put a board together, got our processes together, get ready to move forward as an organization, and we are starting to identify what our first programs at work would be, going out for funding, and our formal launch was going to be in March of 2020, and then we all know what happened then. Covid hit and we just had to step back and rethink our whole business model, but it's been a great experience like in any start-up organization every three months during Covid, it was like, "Well, this is still going, how are we going to best serve women?" So that's what we did.

Christy Kallevig: That is great, and I'm so glad that you did bring this idea back home and launched it here in Minnesota, and it's been just really interesting to watch and be a part of some of the programs that 100 Rural Women have offered, and one of the key. I don't know if you would call it a cornerstone, Teresa but something that really excited me that you did ... that I had the opportunity to participate in were your conversations, I believe you did. Did you do 100 conversations?

Teresa Kittridge: Half ... we're halfway through, that was going to be my initial work was 100 meetings across the state in 100 days, 100 ideas. And with Covid that all just got turned on its head. So we're through our first 50, and now we're just launched our next 50, we just launched that this week.

Christy Kallevig: Okay, great. And in those first 50 conversations that you had, they were virtual, and it was so powerful to see the number of women that came together to talk and discuss what they were experiencing, how they were leading in their communities. What were some of the takeaways that you gathered through that process?

Teresa Kittridge: That's a great question, and we were really fortunate. When Covid hit, it was like, "Oh my gosh, we have no money, we have no resources. How are we going to get this organization up and going?" And I have a couple really sharp young women on my board and we're like, "we could do webinars and can lift up women" and how we can do these 100 meetings across the state? So I just had to really re-think of, how do we do that?

And luckily, the University of Minnesota was interested in that. The Northwest region, the Regional Sustainable Development Partnership gave us dollars to support a graduate student, so that's ... with these 100 meetings, I was really fortunate to be able to work through CURA, the Center for Regional Affairs, and we had two graduate students who have helped us really lay out these meetings, do the research and roll up the findings.

So I think probably the major takeaways, we did a survey and we did convenience. Covid really raised the issue of how women are disproportionately impacted with responsibility and limited time and being able to connect virtually, we found was a huge bonus for women, and it's not something we would have done in the beginning, I would have been out there in person, I'm a total extrovert.

What do you think and what do you do? And it was really both, what are the barriers to leadership, how have you overcome them? What kind of supports would you like, what networks are you involved in? Maybe you don't want to be in a big leadership position that maybe your neighbor does. What can you do to help her? So really it was, how do we best connect as women, how do we lift each other up?

When a woman is in the leadership role or leading in community, or are doing something that they're really stepping up and doing something, how can you lift that woman up and publicly thank her for what she's doing and support her? Where do we find opportunities for women to practice leadership, because it can be overwhelming and it can be hard to figure out what are those pathways to leadership.

So we really heard from women, what are those different leadership roles, how can I get involved and do I have the skill set that I need in order to go after some of this? And it's like, yes, yes, yes, yes, you do. We all have amazing skills to bring to the table, and it's across all sectors, and I'll just use an example on a public service side, on the political side, research shows it takes seven to nine times to ask a woman to run for office before she'll even consider it, women traditionally.

Christy Kallevig: Seven to nine times just to be asked to consider to run, right?

Teresa Kittridge: Women need to be asked, and this is a general finding, but in research, women feel that they need to really be well prepared in all the issues and know all the nuts and bolts before they were to run for office, where generally, when you look at men, they're like, "Oh yeah, I can do that." So it's getting women to realize they bring many skills and assets to the table and getting women to realize that, "No, you've got it. Go for it." You can learn when you get there, you know you have a lot of things to bring to the table, so it's really building one's confidence, women need leadership. So those are probably the biggest takeaways. We had a number of takeaways, and we do have a research report out on the website, and we're going to be coming out in June with a big report on the next 50.

Christy Kallevig: Great, and we'll make sure that it's on our show notes that we link to that report that's currently on your website to make sure that that great information is shared. You know, I think it's so interesting that you brought up the confidence piece, I remember visiting with a woman who was a city council member, and we were just talking about her path towards leadership, and I asked what's one piece of advice that you would share with any other women coming up through the ranks, and her answer really surprise me because it was be prepared to lose, and how that impacts just how you think about yourself, how other people think about you, and I really think that that speaks to that confidence piece, right. But it's not just that you can do the job, but you feel like others think you can do the job ...

Teresa Kittridge: Yeah, no, that's a really good example. And just to stay on that public sector side, public service side, we just launched a new series called Escalating Women, and it's really from the first 50 meetings. We were going to do 100 meetings and we got through the first 50 and I was like, "Well, we have so much data, we're swimming in it, so let's take what we learn in these first 50 and grab those themes to see what's really going to help?"

And one of them is, we want to know how women are in different leadership journeys, and how they got there and what they overcame and how they navigate it, and what is a pathway to that position, and so we do have to. Rita Albrecht, who's a former mayor of Bemidji, and I think she's really going to be interesting because she's done a variety of things in her life, but she ran for the state senate last time around, and the social media bullying and some of those things then. And Rita doesn't have little children now, but when you look at young parents with young children, women are on school boards right now through Covid, all those pieces, it's not just the candidate sometimes, and this goes across all political offices, but it's your whole family that can be a target, how do you prepare for that?

And how do you ... how do you do that? So it's all those pieces of not only getting there, but once you're running, what does that mean and losing or gosh, if you win, then what do you do? How do you not end up being isolated? And where do you find those support networks to help you and help people show: "I've been through this. These are some strategies I use." That's the whole idea of this.

And we also are very fortunate just staying in the elected side. We were selected as a Capstone Project with the Humphrey School, and we have three students right now, and some incredible young women interviewing elected women right now to talk about what was it like to run. Why did you decide to run? What were the barriers? What supports would you have liked to have? And how did you deal with things? And once you got in office, what would be nice to have? So that is something we're looking at. We want to build a network of 100 rural elected women to mentor. It's a mentorship network. It's really all about mentoring.

How do we mentor women, another 100 rural women to seek public service? So that's what it's all about. We are a big blob of mentorship because it is ... everything we do is coming to mentorship, so that's like the grand takeaway is we need to mentor each other in around ages, around sectors, around culture, around race as we better understand each other, all those pieces, so it really is mentorship is our overarching takeaway.

Christy Kallevig: That is so important because there just aren't many stories out there right now about the things that women in elected positions go through both in that run as well as when they're actually in office. So I look forward to hearing more about that work too. With the mentoring piece, are you hearing from people that those connections, the relationships really help to support their emotional and mental well-being, is that kind of a key aspect of this as well?

Teresa Kittridge: Absolutely, and I'm so glad you brought that up because as I'm talking about the key takeaways, one of the top key takeaways was mental health and wellness. Because that is a huge part of what we heard from women and how Covid even pushed that further with isolation and additional responsibility. So that is what we're hearing about mentorship, it's like, "How do I navigate some of this and what are other people doing? And what are those strategies?" So it's really sharing and it's not necessarily old women to young women, it's across the board, it's across the board.

We all have different ways we can mentor, and that whole piece of just having somebody to talk to and somebody who's been through this, it just sort of eases the pressure sometimes. So we are working in the background two of this mentorship network, that would be more of a general mentorship network, but almost like matchmaking. I have these certain skills, I've been through this, this and this, and you have somebody who's looking for help in a certain area, we're trying to figure out how to connect those women.

Probably my biggest frustration with this work is I meet incredible women every week and I'm like, "How do we connect these women?" And I meet somebody, "Oh, you need to meet somebody because ... oh my gosh, that would be great." So that's my biggest frustration is there's just so much opportunity, and we just have to forget that human capacity that we can pull it all together and figure out how to build structures and strategies to connect women and mental health and wellness is a huge piece of that because it is just finding somebody who's been through it or somebody who's got experience and something that can help give you some strategies they use to see if they would work for you. That's a big piece of it.

Christy Kallevig: How would you say ... are you seeing a lot of women coming out to your events, would you say that women in Minnesota, rural women in Minnesota, are craving these connections?

Teresa Kittridge: Absolutely, I think that was another takeaway personally for me because it was scary, it was ... I had it all planned, I was going to start in Luverne and then in Winona ... I just had this whole plan of in-person meetings. This is really our market research, because I think I know ... Of course, I think I know what women need, rural women need because I'm a rural woman. I wanted to hear from women, what do you need? What would help you? How do you navigate this?

And then when Covid hit, we just had to think, Okay, well, I guess we're going to do this virtually, so we were really lucky, we piloted some virtual meetings in the Northwest, and oh my gosh, people came and they were interested and they wanted it to be connected and then in that pilot, it was just sort of those 15 counties in the Northwest part of the state, it was just so apparent that women were craving to connect and covid just threw an extra layer on, as I mentioned, isolation. So much responsibility, but we heard over and over again, and I just heard it again yesterday from a convening we did, "I don't have time for this, I wasn't going to come. Oh my God, I'm so glad I came!" Because people were making connections.

And that's what it's all about, is trying to figure out how do we connect? How do we support each other? How do we learn more about each other? It's a very divisive time, as we all know, and when 100 Rural Women came together, it was so politically divisive in small communities, and I've served on school board, I was chair of the school board I now serve, I was elected, I now serve on a hospital board and in Big Fork, we're a taxation district, districts are elected on the ballot. And you know, it used to be in the old days, you'd walk in, hang your political hat at the door, we all have some kind of politics, but then you're going to do the work.

That's changing, people are bringing a lot of politics into the local. And this is a generalization again, but generally ... well, right now, of course, we're very hierarchical in many communities, and generally men operate and more of a hierarchy. And women, we're more collaborative. In my view on all this, all the crazy years of career as I've had, we need more collaborative leadership, and that's why I really think it's important to have more women engaged. Women lead everywhere, but in decision-making roles, decision-making roles that have impact on policy and investments on what happens in our community. That's a really key piece, and that's what we heard from women was like, "well, I'd like to get involved, I don't really know how to ...

It's like, how do we demystify those paths to leadership? How do we let women know if you do this, there's going to be people there to support you when you have things happen like in a campaign or are you running a business and something happens, there's a network. You can build networks of women to support you, and so that's a piece that people want to connect, they want to figure out how to be more engaged, they're trying to balance lives right now with all the responsibilities, but there is a strong drive and urge to connect with each other.

Christy Kallevig: Yeah, I like the word demystify too, because I think that there is this belief that everything has to be done a certain way, and that you cannot deviate from a path that was developed maybe 100 years ago, but there are so many different ways that you can approach being a leader or just being involved in those decisions, because I think that that's one aspect that I really appreciate about your organization. It's not that you have to have this drive to be a leader, it's that you want to connect or that you want to see things improve for where you are at, and you can just develop those relationships without necessarily running for office or wanting to be the president of a company.

Yeah, absolutely, and I think that's ... hopefully, that's something that we communicate well because it is ... I look at it that way, it's like, Well, yeah, not everybody wants to run for office, but as I said earlier, it's like, maybe you know somebody who wants to, and how can you help them, and what are those other areas that appointed positions that people aren't even aware of that are really opportunities to serve on boards and commissions ... oh my gosh, corporate boards, we get paid to serve on a board. That was like a whole mystery.

So it's like, where are those places where women are sorely under-represented? And I'll just give a quick example, and I'm sorry to keep going back to elective office, but it's top brain today. When you think about company commissioners with 87 counties, it depends on the county, but in most of ironies, we have five, five commissioners. There's seven in the metro, and I'll tell you what, under 15%, I think we're at 14.5% of county commissioners are women, and the majority of those are in the metro in the suburbs. We do have a couple of counties now that have a majority of women, we have a couple of rural counties: Cook, Sherburne, maybe one other ...

Teresa Kittridge: Otherwise, Ramsey and Hennepin now are women, but like where I live in Itasca County, there's no women on the county board. And the county board has a lot of impact on your life.

Christy Kallevig: Yes, they do.

Teresa Kittridge: But you don't have to be on a county commission, they have committees, they have different ways that you can get engaged and have impact in your community. That's some of the work we're doing is identifying what those other roles are and being able to share those out with rural women to see if that's something they're interested in learning more about or being a part of. And trying to figure out balance is a big thing, because we all have busy lives.

And it's sort of like, how do you balance all that? And so it all depends on what your degree involvement could be, there's a lot of different ways to engage, so we're just trying to lift that up and hey, there's a lot of great organizations out there that work to get people elected or to get people to different things. We're not here to develop tons and initiatives and programs, we want to connect. We move resources.

So if you're interested in doing something in the private sector or philanthropic sector, maybe you want to start your own business, we want to help you connect with resources, because the last thing we want to do is recreate the wheel and compete with someone, we want to find out where are those networks that can help you wherever you want to go. So that's really what it's about, it's figuring out how to best connect women resources and to each other.

Christy Kallevig: That's exciting. As you look at the current landscape, Teresa, what opportunities do you see for women, whether it's in direct leadership, elected leadership or organizational positions, what are some of those opportunities that you see for women in sharing their connections, their leadership with others?

Teresa Kittridge: Yeah, I think that there's a lot of opportunity, and I don't have the exact data here, I just reached out to a colleague of yours at the University actually to talk about this a little bit, but some of the initial data I've seen when we look at Covid and pre-Covid, the number of women who are starting their own businesses is dramatic in rural communities, and I think that's a place where women can grow and lead, and we have to help women find those resources and figure out where is that capital that can

help me do that so I don't put my family in crazy debt and all those pieces, so I think the private sector there's a lot of opportunity.

We're really blessed in Minnesota. We have rural philanthropy. We have rural foundations. I think there's a lot of opportunity when you look at the philanthropy community too, for women to be involved and lead and figure out how to support their communities. And on the elected side, there is an article in the paper two weeks ago, I believe, about all the women were starting to lose in the legislature who were in leadership after reapportionment redistricting because a lot of women ended up with their male colleagues and they ended up such a small part of their district, their old districts that they knew they would not be competitive, so we're losing some key people, Julie Rosen, Chair of the Finance Committee in the Senate; Melissa Franzen and she's a minority leader from Edina in the Senate, which is losing a lot of incredible women. So I think there's a lot of opportunity, and not only in the legislature, but in local office, there's a ton of opportunity, but I also think these commissions are just sort of are undersold and people aren't aware, what's the Soil and Water Commission? Okay, that's an elected position.

So it's really identifying that there are more opportunities for women to be engaged in their community, and some of them don't take in an inordinate amount of time, they just take time to be involved and contribute. So I think there's a lot of opportunity, a lot of opportunity for women to go into a variety of different leadership now, and one of the interesting things which I know you and I have talked about to Christy, is I think of women farmers and who farm with their husband, and don't see themselves as business people, and it's sort of redefining what are you doing, who are you and my god, look what you do on that farm. So you might not be driving a tractor every day, but you do everything else.

Teresa Kittridge: Well, those farms don't run without women, it's just to some of those old adage, the way we've defined roles too, I think is an interesting thing, and I think on the Ag side too, there's a lot of women leading some super cool and Ally impact for local foods initiatives in rural Minnesota, I'm excited about that.

Christy Kallevig: They really are. I think that we both commiserate it around the word "just" that I'm just a farm wife or I'm just using that as before you describe yourself as a woman and not recognizing all of the great things that you're doing and contributing.

--intermission music--

Christy Kallevig: So we talked about some of those opportunities that you see for women. Moving forward, what are some of the key challenges that we need to think about how we can either support women to overcome or even some of those just systemic things that we need to be aware of or watch for in helping women to advance?

Teresa Kittridge: It's really interesting when you say that, because one of the things that makes me really nervous about coming out of Covid is we need to take the good that came from Covid and how it impacted our lives with some of the summer meetings we had, the convenings we had in the summer. We had an elected official, I believe she was a city council member, with little kids, and she was saying how it just changed her life when she was able to participate virtually as a city council member and then the legislature came in and did a mandate that all local governments have to meet in person.

She actually testified at a committee when the legislature was building this lot to say that everybody had to meet in person, so I just hope that we think systemically, we really need to think about how do they

keep people out? We need to think about how we can bring people in. And with women, what we're hearing is they need flexibility, that's not just in public office, but that's in corporate life, that's working in a variety of ways. How can we be more flexible so we can balance our work better? And so I'm really hopeful.

I'm nervous. I'm hopeful that coming out of Covid, that we can take, as I mentioned, some of the good that came out of Covid that really gave people more opportunity for more flexibility, and it also raised the issue too, it's like, "Whoa, we need to figure out broadband in rural, that is a utility, everyone deserves broadband, and not just a connection, but actual speed so we can upload and download and participate, that is a hindrance for women, but people were willing to slog it through with our meetings, even though their it was tough.

We tried to really be careful not to use a lot for high-end video, people could call in if they needed to, but I think that that's a big piece, is that how do we maintain that flexibility in how we make sure women can connect and that we do have broadband for their education, for families. For business all the way around.

Christy Kallevig: Such a great point. In that flexibility piece, I think it could help women, it could help so many other under-represented groups to really engage and lead in their own way, if we could just allow greater access to some of those systems that have been in place for so long.

Teresa Kittridge: Yeah, it really is, and it really has made me step back also to think about who are we as an organization and how are we going to best serve our customers, and that's been the beauty of doing the 100 meetings because we're learning what does help, how can we serve and I've worked home office for years, I've traveled, I've done all those pieces, but I really saw this as a person-to-person, in-person organization, and then that's the way you build those relationships is in-person.

And we got to step up and realize that technology is a great way to communicate, and even with some traditional mentorship, I was talking to one of the board members, she said, "You know how great is it that I can be on a mentorship on Zoom with somebody, and I can be sitting in my pajamas and doing it."

I can do that, we can be in our own homes and do some of this work that we would have had a drive to. And I think that's the other thing with rural, it's sort of like we all know how much time do you waste on the road? How much windshield time do you have getting to meetings, being there for a couple of hours and driving back? We can be much more productive virtually, so we're really thinking about our business model and what is the best way for us to serve rural women?

So it's an interesting time. I think it's always like, who's your customer and how can you best serve your customer?

Christy Kallevig: I think it's recognizing that rural women are looking for something a little different because of the hours that I can take to get to and from one location, and the realist in me is going to ... how many loads of laundry could I do me instead of making those drives, so ... absolutely thinking about that. So because connections are so important, I want to make sure that we are able to connect our listeners into as many things that you have coming up, Teresa within 100 rural women as we can. So tell us what some of the up-and-coming things are that we should be going to your website to get registered for, you have a great newsletter that I would encourage everybody to go and get signed up for on the website, but what other fun events do you have coming up for us?

Teresa Kittridge: Yeah, so as I mentioned, we joined the 100 meetings, we did the first 50 that were really deep research of what are the barriers women face, how do they overcome them, what kind of supports do they need, and now the next 50 is we took four big themes that came out of that initial research. One is health and wellness. We're starting out with wellness, so you can go on our website and this is all free, this is all free charge. I keep meeting these incredible women who want to get engaged and help us, but we're going to do a virtual yoga, and it's really more body and movements and not your traditional yoga. We're doing that twice a week at eight and 12 on Mondays and Tuesdays, and it's just 30 minutes out of your day.

Take 30 minutes out of your day to focus on you, that's what we're really trying to do. And then Wednesdays and Thursdays, we just had our first one today, we're doing one on mindfulness meditation, relaxation, again, that's going to be 8:00 AM and a 12:00 PM on Wednesday and Thursday, and that's 30 minutes also just to take some time to breathe, center and will still be collecting information and collecting data and connecting women, but it's just of a neat way to take care of yourself and meet other women along the way, and then we also heard from people that networking was a piece, thematic networking, so we really went around what were the big themes that came out around child care, around civic engagement, around education, where women are struggling to figure out how do I balance the technology and the kids, and how do I do all those pieces?

So we'll be doing each week a Monday afternoon meeting, which is to sort of open network theme. This week it was parents with young children, how do you balance it all? And so that was really fun, and then we just bring me you up together and let me put you in brooms and meet other women and just talk about where you're at and how you could share.

And then our fourth category is mentorship, and people wanted to learn about ... I mentioned earlier, leadership journeys, how did you navigate? How do you get where you are? Did you have a plan? How did this work? So our first one will be Friday with Hara Chalier, she's a president of Central Lakes College, and she's had a great journey and she can share how, no, that wasn't a plan. And how do you become a college president? And what is that? So we'll be having women across sectors, across cultures, across careers, age, race, socio-economic status, really trying to get a diverse group of women to present each week to share their leadership journey.

Teresa Kittridge: And the whole goal of that is we all have a path, and it's really fun to see that not everybody's path was planned from the time they were 10 years old. Some were, and they've done great, other ones have just sort of ... it's happened and you've had to adjust and go do something else, so that's really our mentorship piece is really looking at that. We have webinars, we do monthly webinars, we're skipping one this month, because my gosh, we have seven Mets a week right now, so we don't want to overwhelm people too much.

But we have a book group, but I'm highly encouraged that started during covid, and that has been a gas, and the majority of us, that book group have never been in a book group because we could never commit to be in the same place, same time, and having our homework done. This is like, "read the book. If you don't finish, don't worry, just come join us for a conversation." We do fiction one month, non-fiction, the next. My board chair who's amazing, she's been running book clubs for 20 years for the Women's Press, so she really facilitates this and I have met so many incredible women.

We have a core group of women that always coming in every month, depending on the book or depending on people's schedules. We have new people come in and out. So that's really been fun, and then we will be doing a big webinar in May about comfort projects. I'm really excited about that. That's really going to be fun. Yeah, and so I'm really excited to learn about that. Those are probably our biggest programs that we're working on right now, and then the beauty of these ... when we finish these 100 meetings, it's really going to be for us to step back and say what worked, what didn't, what really interested women and how do we build our program in and find the funding to support that work going forward in those areas.

So it's an exciting time. It's busy. We are a young women power, the only way I made it through Covid was graduate students and interns, so I love it because they pushed me, they pushed me, they pushed me in technology, they pushed me on issues that pushed me to think broader, and I have an incredible board, we have a six-member board, two of our board members are over 50, I think two over 50 and four of them are under 30, and it's a really good group of young women and older women in all different parts of their careers and different cultures.

Everybody brings a different perspective to the table, so I'm really fortunate to have that board also, but yeah, young women are our future, so are we going to start listening to an assembly, I look that too. It's a good piece.

Christy Kallevig: And the events that I have been able to attend, everything is always just so well-managed and organized, and congratulations on just putting together a really great organization and so many wonderful events that can bring women together to have conversations we don't normally get to have.

Teresa Kittridge: Now I say this a lot, but it is, it's just I'm really grateful to be able to do this work and I'm so honored to do this work, and I was fortunate in my family. I grew up with super strong women and rural women, and my grandmother, my great-grandmother and my grandmother from Butterfield. My great-grandmother was one of the first ... she was the first woman on the school board in early 1900, and I was able to have all these strong women in my life, and I just think that's something we all need.

So I just feel so fortunate to have had that. And I'm at the stage in my career too, where I'm at the deep end of it. I want to figure out how can I give back. And what I've learned is everybody I meet at all stages of their careers and their lives, everybody has to figure out how they can give back to each other, so that's the cool thing about this work. It just sort of renews my spirit and my faith in the human race doing this work, so I really benefited quite a bit from doing this work.

Christy Kallevig: Strong women, may we know them. May we raise them? Maybe be them, right?

Teresa Kittridge: Right, that's right. I like it, I like it. Wonderful.

Christy Kallevig: Alright, Teresa, well, I just want to thank you so much for joining me for this podcast conversation, and we really wish you the best of luck with 100 Rural Women going forward.

Teresa Kittridge: Thank you, Thanks so much, Christy. Appreciate the opportunity.

Christy Kallevig: Thank you for listening. Vital Connections On Air is brought to you by the Center for Community Vitality at the University of Minnesota Extension. If you enjoyed this conversation, please be sure to subscribe and leave us a review in your favorite podcast feed. Vital Connections On Air is

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